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ABSTRACT

A study examined the behavior patterns of patrons arriving at theatres that showed both "X" rated and "PG" rated movies. The study was undertaken to update the findings of the President's Commission on Pornography and Obscenity, which conducted similar research in 1970 and 1971. Patrons entering the theatre's X and PG rated movies were photographed with a Super 8mm camera from inside a car parked nearby. The films of the 37 adults entering the X movie and the 28 adults entering the PG movie were analyzed and coded for patron age, clothing type (business or casual), grouping (alone or accompanied), and type of behavior exhibited. Results showed that all patrons of the X movie were male, all but one were white, and five were in business costume. The majority attended alone and most exhibited "conflicted"--anxious or rapid-behavior. In contrast, more females than males attended the PG movie, and all attended in casual costuming, all were white, and the majority attended with at least one other person. The findings suggest that the guilt of attending an adult movie has increased since the early 1970s. (FL)

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ANXIOUS BEHAVIORS OF PATRONS OF AN X-RATED MOVIE: AN UPDATE OF THE WINICK STUDY FOR THE COMMISSION ON OBSCENITY AND PORNOGRAPHY

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ANXIOUS BEHAVIORS OF PATRONS OF AN X-RATED MOVIE:
AN UPDATE OF THE WINICK STUDY FOR THE COMMISSION ON
OBSCENTIY AND PORNOGRAPHY

In 1970 and 1971, the President's Commission on Pornography and Obscenity issued their report, technical findings, and recommendations.[1] This body of work constituted the most comprehensive study of the subject to that time or since. While communication scholars have shown little hesitation in exploring other areas of mass communication, research dealing with the audiences for, the effects of, and the uses of pornography is relatively small. As one indicator of the paucity of research, the Index to Journals in Communication Studies Through 1979, lists only nine articles under the heading of "pornography."[2] Of these nine, two are about legal decisions or definitions,[3] one discusses the sexual orientation of radio talk shows,[4] and one about sexual humor,[5] leaving five articles which, to one degree or another, discuss the audience, effects and/or uses of pornography.[6]

Since the President's Commission issued their findings, the nation has seemed to adopt a somewhat more conservative tenor. The impact of this political/moral shift on the audiences, effects, and uses of pornography seems an appropriate area of inquiry. This paper reports the results of a study designed to examine the impact of a cultural shift on the entry behavior of arriving at a theatre, showing an X-rated "adult" movie.

In addition to an updating of previous work, the present study may offer some evidence in the dispute over the type of audience which is attracted to pornography. Rosenfield argued that the politically disenfranchised are attracted to pornography because it serves "as a surrogate for freedom."[7]

Sanders retorted:

> There are two plausible and compatible explanations for pornography, albeit not rhetorical, which fits the facts well. One is that pornography (erotica) caters to a market for artistic portrayals of sexuality as a multifaceted and complex subject, rather than as a biological necessity or a relatively simple pleasure. . . . A second explanation is that pornography can provide access to sorts, to things sexual which are socially proscribed, or for whatever reason not generally possible.[8]

The differences between Rosenfield's and Sanders' "typical" adult movie patron are large. Rosenfield views the patrons of adult theatres and bookstores as "those lonely, despised, nameless old men whom our economic system has rejected and doomed to an anonymous living death in cheap hotels."[9] Sanders' definition suggests adult theatre patrons are guilty about taking part in proscribed activities and perhaps, tend towards the middle or high end of socio-economic standing.

An examination of patrons attending an adult X-rated movie should provide evidence to evaluate the two questions addressed by this research. This study attempts to go beyond simple replication to offer evidence for competing theories of the pornographic audiences.

Winick's Study of Adult Patrons

In 1970, as part of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography's attempt to define and determine the distribution and effects of obscenity and pornography, Charles Winick observed the characteristics of patrons of adult theatres and bookstores.[10] As noted above, the present study seeks to replicate Winick's observations of the behaviors of adult theatre patrons with emphasis on those he labeled "conflicted."

Winick's study required a distinction in adult themes and movies because mainstream movies like Midnight Cowboy carried X-ratings and were not distinguished from the fare carried at adult theatres. Currently, such distinctions

between types of movies appear to be clearer. Mainstream movies, however explicit, tend to carry R-ratings and their producers bend every effort to avoid an X label. On the other hand, sexually explicit movies which carry the X-rating conform to Winick's categorization of adult movies which seek explicitness and lack plot and characterization. Also, they seem to seek the X-rating as a clear indicator of potential viewers of the nature of such movies' content.

A second distinction drawn in the original study seems to have been blurred over time. Winick noted that adult theatres were less concerned with "perversions" and were "less explicit, and more moralistic than 'stag films,' which may show bestiality, coitus, cunnilingus, fellatio, anal intercourse, and other forms of sexual contact."[11] Presently, adult movies appear to deal with those themes earlier ascribed to stag films thus making fuzzy the differences between the two types of films, at least in the area of content.

Winick's observations of demographic characteristics and behaviors of ticket buyers at adult theatres have been repeated in the present study. The communities he studied ranged from major cities like New York to one small, college community--Amherst, Massachusetts. This study was completed in a community similar to Amherst and data comparisons made in this report are focused upon Amherst.

The demographic categories established in the original study were sex, age, and ethnicity. The age groupings were 19 to 27, 28 to 40, 41 to 60, and over 60. Ethnic categories were oriental, black, Spanish-American, and white. Again, those categorizations have been replicated in this study. Earlier results for the Amherst group showed that 87% of adult movie patrons were male and 13% female. That female attendance figure was quite high in comparison to other cities studied. The other communities ranged from a low of 1% to a high of 5% in suburban New York.

Ages of adult movie patrons clustered in the younger age group; the 19 to 27 age grouping contained 64% of the patrons. Some 15% were in the age range from 28 to 40 and 21% from 41 to 60. Of course, that was largely a function of the young population of a college town.

Last, the ethnic breakdown of the Amherst group was heavily skewed toward whites who comprised 91% of the sample. None were in the Spanish-American category, 9% were black, and 1% oriental. As in the age grouping results, the relatively small numbers of minority viewers could be explained as a function of the town's population. In the cities, minority figures tended to be higher. Still, white patrons constituted the bulk of the adult theatre audience as is illustrated by a mean percentage of 81.

Winick also looked at the grouping of patrons noting whether each viewer arrived at the theatre as a single, as a heterosexual couple, or in varying groups of same or different sex aggregates. In the Amherst sample, 70% of patrons were lone males and no lone females. A full 25% were mixed sex dyads an unusually high figure when compared to the cities where 2 to 6% was the norm. This may have reflected the more liberal attitude of the college town. In the other groupings, 4% of patrons arrived in groups of two or more males and 1% as two or more female/male couples. The latter two figures were consistent with results from other cities.

Costume was used in the Winick study as a gauge of socioeconomic status of the patrons. Four classes were derived: business attire to designated white collar workers, work clothes for blue collar, casual, or informal, and military. The military category was not taken as definitive since military personnel may easily in mufti and, therefore, not be recognizable as service persons. Since costume is often associated with socioeconomic status, tentative attempts to correlate costumes with socioeconomic groups were made. In

Amherst, 34 percent of patrons were categorized as lower class, 66 as middle class, and none as upper middle. The first two classes ran reasonably close to figures for the cities (and the mean percentages), but the last class was low, as the mean for all locations had 14 percent of patrons categorized as upper middle class. The costuming breakdown was 10 percent business, 84 percent casual, 5 percent work, and 1 percent military.

The last appearance classification was tripartite including "conventional," "hippie," and "impaired." The hippie classification, a function of its time, was based upon hair length, beads and other accoutrements of the era. The category of impaired referred to 'deformed, handicapped, disabled, or obese." For the Amherst population, the classifications wer 82 percent conventional, 18 percent hippie, and no impaired. The hippie figure of 18 percent ran far in excess of the cities where the highest figure was 8 percent with an average of 4 percent.

Behavior was the second major class of variables studied by Winick. The groupings focused on two particular forms of behavior, which Winick called "conflicted," at the box office area--anxious and rapid. The anxious category was devised to represent discomfort with the thought of being seen entering the theatre. Some patrons "uneasily dawdled" in the vicinity of the theatre and looked about furtively before purchasing a ticket. Some studied watches and newspapers in an exaggerated manner attempting casualness while others looked from side to side or lowered their heads. Some patrons walked past the theatre, stopped, appearing to reconsider, then returned. Many kept their heads down when confronting the cashier, thus avoiding eye contact.

Rapid behavior was characterized by walking to the theatre at an extremely fast pace which accelerated when nearing the establishment. Often,

patrons turned sharply into the box office when it seemed they would walk briskly past. Many had exact change ready to reduce the time involved in ticket purchasing. Winick took this behavior to be an indicator of the desire to minimize the chance of recognition by others.

An average of 83 percent of all patrons showed "normal" behavior at the box office as defined by studies of persons attending mainstream motion pictures. Some 17 percent showed conflicted behaviors. In Amherst, 88 percent of patrons showed normal behaviors and 12 percent conflicted. The range of conflictedness, about 60 percent of conflicted persons from Winick's combined populations showed anxious behavior and 40 percent followed the rapid pattern. The rapid pattern was more prevalent in larger mid-town areas and anxiousness was most prevalent in smaller communities.

The present study represents an attempt to look at patrons of an X-rated film in a community similar to Amherst to see if the observations recorded by Winick have undergone any changes over time. Winick's age, costuming, grouping, and conflictedness categories have been repeated and his observation procedures utilized.

METHOD

Patrons of a movie theatre located in a university town in the east were photographed as they entered the theatre for a matinee performance. The theatre was particularly well suited for this study because of its showing both adult X-rated movies some weeks and mainstream motion pictures other weeks, the same patterned evidenced in Winick's Amherst locations. In the present study, these mainstream movies were usually those which had played at larger houses in the same town for some time and were moved to the smaller theatre for the rest of their runs. The theatre is located in a small strip shopping center, shaped like an upside down L with the theatre located in the

foot of the L. Extending out and down from the L is a parking lot, which extends to the street. The entrance to the theatre is exposed to the view of pedestrians on the sidewalk, persons entering and leaving the parking lot, and from the police station across the street. The lack of sizable pedestrian traffic at the mall added to the openness to view of patrons entering the theatre. The anonymity of the adult patron of many other adult theatres is assured by heavy pedestrian traffic flow.

Clientele for the two types of movies shown at the theatre were used for the present study. One group entered the theatre during the exhibition of an X-rated movie, "Insatiable." The second group entered the theatre during the showing of a PG movie, "The Four Seasons." Each group was photographed using a Super 8mm camera, from the inside of a car parked in the shopping center's parking lot. While the photographer was not in direct view, no other measures were taken to hide his presence or activity. The visual record does not indicate any evidence that the photographer was observed. The PG patrons were used as controls for normative theatre entry behavior by which to compare the X patrons.

The films of adult patrons (N=37) and PG patrons (N=28) were analyzed using procedures adapted from Winick. The age of the patrons, costuming, grouping, and whether the patron exhibited conflicted behavior was noted for each of the X patrons. Two judges independently assigned each of the X patrons to the categories of 18 and under, 19-27, 28-40, 41-60, 61 and older. The judges were in initial agreement in all but two cases. The two disagreements were resolved by employing higher resolution equipment and having raters reach consensus. The costuming of each patron was categorized into either business --wearing a tie and/or sports coat with slacks--and casual. Interrater reliability was 100% for costuming and grouping.

Before classifying X patrons as conflicted or non-conflicted, the raters viewed the entry behavior of the PG patrons who acted as a control group. This sensitized the raters to normal entry behavior for this particular theatre.

Conflicted behaviors were operationalized by using Winick's definition. Those people who exhibited either anxious or rapid behaviors were assigned to their appropriate category and labeled conflicted. Anxious behaviors were exhibited by people who would pass the door with little observance of the environment.

RESULTS

Not surprisingly, the distribution of ages for the PG versus X viewers were different. Of the 37 X patrons, 17 (46 percent) were 19-27, 12 (32 percent) were 28-40, and 8 (22 percent) were 41-60 years of age. All X patrons were male, all except one black, were caucasian, and five (14 percent) were in business costume. The vast majority of the patrons attended alone with only one group of two observed. The PG patrons showed a different pattern (See Table 1). Women (n=18) outnumbered male patrons (n=10). All attended in casual costuming and all were caucasian. Of the 28 PG patrons, 22 attended with at least one other person.

In determining whether an X patron was conflicted, the film of the PG patrons was viewed prior to classification of the X patrons. It was assumed that the PG patrons would not be exhibiting conflicted behavior and could serve as a model for normal entry behavior. Only seven X patrons were rated as not being conflicted. Patrons who exhibited anxious behaviors were seven, rapid behavior eighteen, and two exhibited both types of conflict. Three of the X patrons could not be coded because of too brief an appearance on the film.

DISCUSSION

The present evidence indicates that the guilt of attending an "adult" theatre may be on the increase from an ebb in the early 1970's. Comparing Winick's results, the sample indicates that the age of the people patronizing adult movies has shifted. This shift may be due to an aging of the population. The baby-boom generation moving to an older age group would account for some of the increase in the 38-40 age group, found in this study as compared to the previous study.

The most striking difference between the Amherst and the present sample is the presence of conflicted behavior exhibited by 73 percent of the X patrons in this study compared to the 17 percent reported for the Amherst sample. If conflicted behavior is manifestation of guilt or nervousness in attending X-rated movies, the guilt or fear has increased since the early 1970's.

Another difference within the conflicted sub-population is the distribution of anxious and rapid behaviors. Winick reported 60% of all his conflicted samples acted in an anxious manner with 40% displaying rapid behaviors. The present study indicates that only 26% of the conflicted behaviors were deemed anxious, 67% deemed rapid, and 7% displayed both behaviors.

Several factors may be operating to produce this increase in conflicted behavior. The more conservative atmosphere of recent years may be responsible for a greater concern in being observed attending an adult movie. A type of moral retrograde may be operating. If so, the prospect for the 1980's is for a less accepting view of adult movie attendance.

A second and complementary explanation is the proximity of the theatre to the police station. The knowledge that there is a clear and unobstructed view from the police station to the door of the theatre may encourage rapid behavior. The usual "camouflage" of heavy pedestrian traffic in the vicinity

of most adult theatres is not available in the present case. This openness to view may also reflect the imbalance between rapid and anxious behavior noted in the present study. Many of the anxious behaviors are designed to signal to the casual observer that the patron is indulging in a spur-of-the-moment decision rather than acting in a premeditated fashion. In the present case, there is infrequent pedestrian traffic at which to transmit these messages of spontaneity. The most readily acceptable substitute is rapid behavior. In addition, the issue of premeditation versus spontaneity may become less important across from a police station where the police may be perceived as uncaring as to motive. The important point is to remove oneself from possible observation. However, this possible need to adopt new behaviors may increase conflicted behaviors not covered in Winick's or the present operationalization. Raters noted that there were at least two of the nonconflicted patrons who they considered to be showing abnormal behaviors compared to the PG audience but that the behaviors did not fall within the coding scheme for conflictedness.

The present study seems to support Sanders' view of the motivation for pornographic patrons. The present evidence indicates that these individuals seem to be seeking access to socially proscribed sexual events. The disproportionate number of patrons exhibiting conflicted behavior suggests they perceive a social disapproval of their activity. Only one individual was observed who might fit Rosenfield's depiction of X patrons as social outcasts. The evidence from this study and from Winick's study all lack support for Rosenfield's contention.

The present study suffers from a number of limitations. The sample size, the "atypical" community, the looseness of some of the categorization schemes suggest caution against overgeneralizing. Yet, the results seem

internally consistent, consistent within at least one theory of the pornographic audience, and consistent with the tenor of the times. Study of this area of mass communication should continue on a broader scale.

TABLE 1

Age and Sex of PG Patrons

	-18	19-27	28-40	41-60	60+	Total
Men	2 7.1%	5 17.9%	1 3.6%	2 7.1%	0 0%	10 34.7%
Women	3 10.7%	9 32.1%	3 10.7%	2 7.1%	1 3.6%	18 64.2%
Total	5 17.8%	14 50.0%	4 14.3%	4 14.2%	1 3.6%	28 99.9%

FOOTNOTES

[1]President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, The Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (G.P.O.: Washington, D.C., 1971).

[2]Ronald J. Matlon, Index to Journals in Communication Studies Through 1979 (Annandale: Speech Communication Association, 1980).

[3]Kenneth S. Devol, "The Ginzburg Decision: Reactions in California," Journal of Communication (45), 1966, pp. 271-278, see also James Walter Wesolowski, "Obscene, Indecent, or Profane Broadcast Language as Construed by the Federal Courts." Journal of Broadcasting, 13 (1969), pp. 203-219.

[4]John C. Colvin, "The Rise and Fall of Topless Radio," Journal of Communication, 26 (Winter 1976), pp. 31-37.

[5]Antony J. Chapman and Nicholas J. Godfield, "Is Sexual Humor Sexist?" Journal of Communication, 26 (Winter 1976), pp. 141-153.

[6]Donald M. Gillmer, "The Puzzle of Pornography," Journalism Quarterly, 42 (1965), pp. 363-372; see also Don D. Smith, "The Social Content of Pornography," Journal of Communication, 26 (Winter 1976), pp. 16-26; John Stauffer and Richard Frost, "Male and Female Interest in Sexually-oriented Magazines," Journal of Communication, 26 (Winter 1976), pp. 25-30; Victor Bachy, "Danish 'Permissiveness' Revisited,," Journal of Communication, 26 (Winter 1976), pp. 40-43; and Lawrence W. Rosenfield, "Politics and Pornography," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 59 (1973), pp. 413-422.

[7]Rosenfield, 44.

[8]Robert E. Sanders, "On Rosenfield on Pornography," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 60 (1974), 372.

[9]Rosenfield, 417.

[10]Charles Winick, "Some Observations on Characteristics of Patrons of Adult Theatres and Bookstores," in Technical Report of the Commission on

Obscenity and Pornography, Vol. IV (G.P.O.: Washington, D.C., 1971), pp. 225-244. All subsequent references from Winick refer to this report.

[11]Winick, p. 227.